

Guest Commentary: Why We Shouldn't Privatize Public Education

By: [Admin](#)
Learning Lab
November 2, 2015



Guest columnist Richard Stutman argues that charter schools, like this one in Newark, N.J., take resources away from school districts and students. (Shanel Sommers/AP)

By Richard Stutman

A recent ruling by Washington state's Supreme Court [declared charter schools unconstitutional](#), which has only served to further fuel the debate surrounding these often controversial educational institutions. The ruling, which argued that charter schools are not truly public schools because they are not governed by elected boards, found that these schools largely adhere to their own standards and as such are not [accountable to voters](#). Charter schools are in fact independently run and operate without the same accountabilities as truly public schools.

As someone who was a teacher and is now the president of the 11,000-member Boston Teachers Union, I agree that we need to provide more educational options to low-income students, but charter schools are not the way to do this. In fact, their growth is a step toward privatizing public education. Charter schools take opportunities away from the other public schools by cherry-picking the students who come through their doors.

While any student can technically “enter” the lottery, the students who have friends or family supporting them throughout this process have a leg up. But what about the students who lack this support system?

In addition to the possible logistical hurdle that the charter school application process and follow-through presents to students, there is a financial toll that hurts districts. Traditional public schools lose money at the hands of charter schools. In fact, [more than \\$10,000](#) is taken from our public school budget each time a student decides to attend a charter school.

In many cases in Boston, students go directly from private or parochial schools to charter schools. In these instances, the district loses a per-capita tuition payment for that student. Some ask how the loss of “just one” student can impact a public school’s finances. While it’s true that initially a school with fewer students may experience fractional savings on books and supplies, other costs do not translate to savings merely because a student no longer attends the school.

Even when short one, two or three students, a classroom still needs a teacher, and it still needs to pay to heat the classroom in the winter, for example. The school ends up paying out the same amount of money for these needed resources, even with fewer students served.

Despite these disadvantages, charter school proponents still tout the positive outcomes students achieve through charter school education. That’s understandable and to be expected. What they don’t tell us is that this “success” comes at a cost of a higher forced attrition rate of their students, who exit charters at a phenomenal rate.

Our city’s public schools take in those students evicted by charters, even as they arrive mid-year and particularly around the time of the state’s MCAS test. We do so willingly. It’s our responsibility, and we welcome that responsibility.

And we also do a great job: Our [dropout rate](#) has never been lower, and our achievement gap is shrinking. So let’s keep the cap on charter schools and keep our limited resources where they can do the most good — in our public schools.

Richard Stutman is president of the Boston Teachers Union.